

Army Corps of Engineers Holding Up Mining Permit Process WASHINGTON, D.C. — Dissatisfied with the amount of time it takes for the Army Corps of Engineers to approve new mining permits, Congressman Charlie Wilson (OH-6) joined a group of Ohio lawmakers to send a letter demanding answers on the delays. Wilson aligned with Congressmen Zack Space (OH-18), John Boccieri (OH-16), and Tim Ryan (OH-17), all of whom are seeing similar problems in their coal mining districts.

“Coal is an important industry in Ohio’s Sixth District,” Wilson said. “These delays hurt this industry and that can ultimately cost jobs. The Army Corps needs to speed up the permit review process so that the coal industry can continue mining.”

In addition to the Army Corps backlog of approximately 150 to 200 permits, the Environmental Protection Agency recently announced that it also plans to review all pending mining permits. This will only serve to further delay the approval process for new applications.

This letter is in direct response to the requests of local coal companies who have been delayed due to the Army Corps backlog.

The letter is included below:

Dear Brigadier General John W. Peabody:

We write to express our deep concern with the growing backlog of coal mining permit applications currently pending in the U.S. Corps of Engineers District Engineers’ Offices under your command. Media reports placed the backlog in the range of 150-200 permits. The Environmental Protection Agency’s recent announcement that it plans to review pending coal mining permit applications raises the prospect that the backlog will only continue to grow. Since many of these permit applications have been pending for a year or more, it would seem that EPA had more than an adequate opportunity to review and comment on these applications.

The permitting delays pose grave consequences for our constituents and local economies. First, these permits are necessary to create and sustain some of the highest paying jobs in our states. Second, in addition to miners employed at these operations, the products and services purchased to support their construction and operation creates thousands of other jobs. Third, the coal produced at these operations provides affordable and reliable electricity that keep factories and businesses competitive. Finally, the tax revenues from coal mining fund schools and other vital government services. In sum, we have significant concerns about policies that impede economic development in a difficult economic time.

So that we can formulate a better understanding of the breadth and depth of the current permit backlog, we would appreciate you furnishing information that responds to the following questions:

1. How many coal mining permit applications are currently pending in each District Engineers

Office?

2. How many of these pending permit applications have had public notices issued by the District engineers before February 24, 2009?
3. How many of these permit applications have been deemed complete by the district engineers?
4. Under the Corps regulations for processing permits, how many of the pending permit applications were available for EPA review and comment prior to its announcement that it would conduct further review of pending permits?
5. What, if any, criteria has EPA furnished the district engineers about which permits EPA will subject to further review as indicated in the agency's recent announcement?
6. Has the Corps developed a plan that will clear the backlog of coal mining permits and assure processing of future applications within the timeframes provided for in the agency's regulations?

In view of the urgency of this matter, we would appreciate your prompt response to our concerns and questions.

Sincerely,

Congressman Charlie Wilson
Congressman Zack Space
Congressman John Boccieri
Congressman Tim Ryan